

Message Text

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73

ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1027

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 4927

LIMDIS

E.O.11652: XGDS

TAGS: PINT

SUBJECT: THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

REF: GUATEMALA 4905

1. DURING SHORT VISIT WITH PRESIDENT ARANA THIS MORNING TO PRESENT HIM WITH AUTOGRAPHED PHOTO OF THUNDERBIRDS HE TOLD ME HE FELT THE POLITICAL PANORAMA WITH REGARD TO THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN WAS SOMEWHAT MURKY AT THE MOMENT BUT THAT HE THOUGHT IT WOULD CLARIFY ITSELF DURING THE COURSE OF THE MONTH AND THAT THE GOG COALITION CAMPAIGN WOULD THEN GET ON THE TRACKS. HE SAID HE DID NOT BELIEVE THAT THE CANDIDACY OF RIOS MONTT POSED A SERIOUS THREAT TO THE LAUGERUD-SANDOVAL SLATE. HE SAID HE BELIEVED THAT THE PERSONS WHO WOULD BE ATTRACTED TO RIOS MONTT AND THE GROUPS SUPPORTING HIM WOULD NEVER HAVE VOTED FOR THE OFFICIAL COALITION IN ANY EVENT AND THUS RIOS MONTT WOULD NOT DRAW SUPPORTERS OR VOTES AWAY FROM THE GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, HE SAID, IF COLONEL ENRIQUE PERALTA SHOULD SOMEHOW BECOME A CANDIDATE THIS WAS AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT MATTER. HE WOULD SERIOUSLY WEAKEN AND DIVIDE THE GOG COALITION'S SUPPORT AND PUT THE LAUGERUD-SANDOVAL CANDIDACY IN DEEP DIFFICULTY. ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT SAY SO DIRECTLY, THE PRESIDENT APPEARED CONCERNED THAT PERALTA MIGHT SOMEHOW FIND A LEGAL VEHICLE

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TO SUPPORT HIS CANDIDACY. (AT THE MOMENT THIS COULD ONLY

MEAN THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (PR).)

2. IN PREVIOUS CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT (MLN) STALWART MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT ROBERTO HERRERA IBARGUEN, THE CHIEF OF THE POLITICAL SECTION AND MYSELF, HERRERA EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER THE WAY THE COALITION'S CAMPAIGN HAD BEEN GOING, CHARACTERIZING IT AS "SO-SO." HE LAMENTED THE FACT THAT THE COALITION DID NOT HAVE GOOD PROPAGANDISTS TO GENERATE ENTHUSIASM FOR THE SLATE AND SAID HE FELT THE CAMPAIGN WAS NOT ROLLING ALONG AS STEADILY OR AS RAPIDLY AS IT SHOULD. HERRERA SAID HE BELIEVED THAT UNLESS CAMPAIGN TACTICS CHANGED FOR THE BETTER, THE RACE WOULD BE A VERY TOUGH ONE, ALTHOUGH HE BELIEVED LAUGERUD AND SANDOVAL WOULD SQUEAK THROUGH IN THE END. HOWEVER, HERRERA, LIKE THE PRESIDENT, EXPRESSED DEEP CONCERN OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF PERALTA'S CANDIDACY, SAYING THIS WOULD BE "FATAL" FOR THE COALITION. HE SPECIFICALLY EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT CARLOS SAGASTUME WOULD CEDE THE PR NOMINATION TO PERALTA, BUT HE ADDED THAT THIS WOULD BE A VERY DIFFICULT STEP FOR SAGASTUME, "BECAUSE IF HE DID THAT AFTER ALL WE'VE PAID HIM HE WOULD PROBABLY DIE OF A HEART ATTACK."

3. COMMENT: THE PANORAMA DOES INDEED APPEAR SOMEWHAT MURKY AT THE MOMENT. WE HAVE BEEN RECEIVING CONFLICTING REPORTS FROM VARIOUS HIGH-LEVEL SUPPORTERS OF THE OFFICIAL COALITION RANGING FROM OPEN OPTIMISM ABOUT THE COALITION'S PROSPECTS TO CONCERN SUCH AS THAT EXPRESSED BY HERRERA TO PESSIMISM VOICED BY ARMY G-2. IT IS EVIDENT THAT THE COALITION CAMPAIGN HAS NOT PICKED UP THE MOMENTUM THAT WAS HOPED FOR AND THAT THE COALESCING OF SIGNIFICANT SECTORS OF THE OPPOSITION AROUND RIOS IS OF CONCERN TO THE GOVERNMENT. THE GOVERNMENT, ACCORDING TO REPORTS WE HAVE RECEIVED, IS APPARENTLY ATTEMPTING TO CONVINCE SAGASTUME TO CEDE TO SOME OTHER POLITICAL FIGURE SUCH AS COLONEL PAIZ NOVALES WHOM THEY FEEL WOULD DRAW MORE VOTES AWAY FROM THE OPPOSITION THAN WOULD SAGASTUME BUT WOULD NOT OFFER A SERIOUS THREAT TO THE COALITION. HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT ALSO SEEMS GENUINELY CONCERNED THAT SAGASTUME WILL YIELD TO PERALTA'S PRESSURE AND DOUBLE CROSS THEM BY GIVING HIM THE PR NOMINATION. ALTHOUGH SAGASTUME HAS TOLD US HE IS TALKING TO PERALTA, IT IS LIKELY THAT UNDER THE CIR-
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CUMSTANCES SAGASTUME WOULD DO A GREAT DEAL OF SOUL SEARCHING BEFORE CEDING THE CANDIDACY TO HIM.
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